

HABS
OHIO,
31-CINT,
13-

Cincinnati City Hall
801 Plum Street
Cincinnati
Hamilton County
OHIO

HABS No. OH-418

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

"AMERICA'S CITY HALLS" PROGRAM

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Name: Cincinnati City Hall

Location: 801 Plum Street
Cincinnati
Hamilton County
OhioOccupies the entire block bounded by Eighth, Plum,
Ninth Streets and Central Avenue.

Present Owner and Occupant: City of Cincinnati

Present Use: City Administrative Offices

Significance: Cincinnati's City Hall represents the prevailing architectural tastes at the time of its construction and the influence of H. H. Richardson on its designer, Samuel Hannaford. Richardson's winning design for the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce building was executed in the 1880's; however, the building's demolition in 1911 left City Hall the best remaining example of Richardson Romanesque in Cincinnati. Samuel Hannaford practiced from 1858 until 1897 and made a significant contribution to the architectural heritage of the Cincinnati area.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. Date of Erection:

Ground Breaking: February 27, 1888
Corner Stone Laid: August 16, 1888
Dedication: May 13, 1893

2. Architect:

Samuel Hannaford - Architect and Superintendent
Samuel Hannaford and Sons
Cincinnati, Ohio

Source: "The Cincinnati City Hall 1802-1896" Edwin Henderson.

Samuel Hannaford was Cincinnati's most prominent and prolific nineteenth century architect, particularly during the 1877-1897 period. From 1858-1900 Hannaford, his partners, and his sons were responsible for the designs of over 300 buildings and structures in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, West Virginia, and Tennessee. Of the buildings in the Cincinnati area, 55 are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including Cincinnati City Hall.

3. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers:

David Hummel Building Company, Cincinnati, Ohio
Contractors for excavation, masonry, brickwork, cut stone, and interior granite work.

Sources of stone:

brown stone - Wisconsin
buff stone - Amherst, Ohio
granite - Missouri
flat rock - Indiana
marble stairways and wainscoting - Italy and Tennessee
granite columns in corridors - Vermont

James Griffith and Sons, Cincinnati, Ohio
Contractors for all woodwork.

G. C. Riordan and Pottier, Stymus & Company
Stained glass.

F. Pedretti's Sons

Original murals (most have been painted over).

More information on sources of materials and contractors, as well as a record of costs and disbursements is found in "The Cincinnati City Hall 1802-1896" by Edwin Henderson.

4. Original Plans:

Original plans are located at the Cincinnati Historical Society and include 37 exterior and 51 interior drawings. Although no complete elevations are included in this collection, early photographs, also

located at the Historical Society, indicate that the building's exterior is relatively unaltered. Interior alterations have been more extensive but the essential architectural character has been maintained.

5. Alterations and Additions:

Original double hung sash have been replaced with aluminum sash, and the tympanums of most arched windows have been filled. Four ground floor windows on the north elevation have also been filled. Several finials located on the wall dormers have been removed. These are being refabricated and will be replaced. Cresting above the clock tower and along the roof of the front facade has been removed. Major interior elements have been retained, however ceilings and walls have been replastered, covering the original murals and wallpapers. One ceiling mural does remain in the east foyer. All mechanical systems have been installed near the ceiling in the north and south corridors, avoiding the principal corridors and stairwells on the east and west.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first city building located on this site was built in 1852, and occupied approximately 2/3 of the block. In 1888 the offices were moved to temporary quarters a few blocks away and the original structure was demolished to allow construction of the present building. Construction costs totaled \$1,610,000, of which Samuel Hannaford, as architect and superintendent of construction, was paid \$54,000. The first session of the Board of Legislation met in the new City Building, April 7, 1893.

Source:

"The Cincinnati City Hall 1802-1896" by Edwin Henderson gives a complete history of previous city hall locations, as well as the resolution of the Board of Legislation for construction of the new City Hall.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR:

This is a four and one half story masonry building, rectangular in plan with projecting pavilions on the east and west facades. The southeast corner of the mass is emphasized by the nine-story clock tower. Wall surfaces are rusticated and decorated in the usual way of the Richardsonian Romanesque style with complementary materials of granite and sandstone. Typical Romanesque detail abounds: bowtell mouldings; drilled and sculptured foliated panels, capitals, and gables; paired and engaged colonnettes; rock-faced rustication; arcaded and round arch window openings; and a tile roof of intersecting mansard, hip, gable, pavilion and circular roof elements. The wall dormers are further enhanced by sandstone finials.

B. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

Major entrances are centrally located on the east and west facades and secondary entrances on the north and south. These doorways lead to the interior corridor circulation system. Ornate marble stairs located opposite the east and west entrances, respectively, are supplemented by elevators. The stairwells have stained glass windows with allegorical scenes of early Cincinnati, and these receive their light from the two interior courts. The detail of the stairs is augmented by carved marble columns with capitals in the Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite styles. Simple oak woodwork and furniture provide a contrast to the elaborate masonry elements.

C. SITE:

The building occupies the entire block bounded by Eighth, Plum, Ninth and Central, and it shares the Eighth and Plum corner with two other prominent buildings: the Isaac M. Wise Temple and St. Peter-in-Chains Cathedral.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS:

The original linens prepared by Samuel Hannaford and Sons are located at the Cincinnati Historical Society. A complete list of these drawings is attached.

B. EARLY VIEWS:

Several turn-of-the-century photographs with negatives of the exterior of City Hall are available at the Cincinnati Historical Society.

C. BIBLIOGRAPHY:

"Dedication of New City Hall, Cincinnati" This brochure was published in 1893, and is available at the Municipal Library, City Hall.

"The Cincinnati City Hall 1802-1896" by Edwin Henderson, available at the Cincinnati Historical Society.

Cincinnati City Hall National Register Nomination prepared by John C. Garner.

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